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The seals of London's governing elite in the thirteenth century

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THIRTEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND XIV

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE ABERYSTWYTH
AND LAMPETER CONFERENCE, 2011

Edited by
Janet Burton
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The Seals of London's Governing Elite in the Thirteenth Century

John McEwan

As Andrew McGuinness observed in the proceedings of the fifth Thirteenth Century England conference, scholars have traditionally focussed on the seals of monarchs, nobles, and ecclesiastics (as well as monasteries and boroughs), and overlooked those of people of lesser standing.¹ Our understanding of the seals of relatively humble people has been considerably enhanced by his work and that of a number of other scholars, but much remains to be learned.² Indeed, historians still do not know if people outside the aristocracy, in a similar fashion to the aristocracy, had seals whose iconography indicated their position in society.³ The problem is that historians have not yet assembled sufficient evidence to draw definitive conclusions.⁴ Only a fraction of the seals have been catalogued or published; before scholars can study the seals of people outside the aristocracy, their seals need to be made more accessible by the archive community.⁵ Moreover, as those seals become available, historians will need to prepare biographies of the sigillants to set the seals in their social contexts. As the lives of people outside the aristocracy are generally poorly documented, this will be challenging. However, as historians begin to compare and contrast significant numbers of seals indexed according to the social position of their owners, then they become able to consider whether features of the seals conveyed information about the social standing of their owners.⁶ This paper aspires to make a modest contribution to this project through a case study of the seals of

¹ A.F. McGuinness, 'Non-armigerous seals and seal-usage in thirteenth-century England', *TCE* 5 165.

² M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1993), 51; P.D.A. Harvey and A. McGuinness, *A Guide to British Medieval Seals* (1996), 77-93; P.D.A. Harvey, 'Personal seals in thirteenth-century England', in *Church and Chronicle in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to John Taylor*, ed. I. Wood and G.A. Loud (1991), 117-27; R. Hilton, *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1975), 153-5; F.M. Stenton, *Documents Illustrative of the Social and Economic History of the Danelaw from Various Collections* (1920), xcii.

³ Harvey and McGuinness, *Guide to British Medieval Seals*, 78. For the relationship between seals and social standing, see: B.M. Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago: Signs of Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2011), 28-9.

⁴ Harvey, 'Personal seals', 119.

⁵ H. Jenkinson, *A Guide to Seals in the Public Record Office* (1968), 6; McGuinness, 'Non-armigerous seals', 166-7.

⁶ This is an approach which historians have already profitably applied to a number of groups of elite men and women in medieval society. For example, see: W.H. St John Hope, 'The seals of English bishops', *Proc. of the Soc. of Antiquaries* 11 (1885/7), 271-306; B. Bedos-Rezak, 'The social implications of the art of chivalry: the sigillographic evidence (France 1050-1250)', in *The Medieval Court in Europe*, ed. E.R. Haymes (Munich, 1986), 142-75, reprinted in *Form and Order in Medieval France: Studies in Social and Quantitative Sigillography* (Aldershot, 1993), chapter vi, 1-31 [from which any subsequent references are taken]; B. Bedos-Rezak, 'Women, seals and power in medieval France', in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. M. Erler and M. Kowaleski (1988), 61-82, reprinted in *Form and Order in Medieval France*, chapter ix, 61-82 [from which any subsequent references are taken].

men who directed London's civic government, c. 1150–1300.⁷ These men had seals that reflected their social position in society. Furthermore the relationship between social standing and seal iconography in this group is remarkably complex.⁸

A seal is a set of graphic elements engraved into a seal matrix that manifest when it is pressed into a plastic material, such as a lump of wax attached to a document.⁹ Medieval seal impressions normally survive as components of written records, and as such they can often be precisely dated, situated in a location, and associated with a particular person or corporate entity based on evidence contained in the document. Nonetheless, historians have yet to attempt to integrate fully sigillographic evidence into the prosopography of thirteenth-century London.¹⁰ Indeed, the richness of the surviving sigillographic evidence is perhaps not sufficiently appreciated. This paper will, therefore, first offer an overview of the sigillographic sources for thirteenth-century London. Then, because the men involved in civic government are well known to historians, this paper will summarize briefly the evidence for their position in society. In the final section, two complementary approaches to assessing their seals will be employed to investigate the relationship between their identities and the iconography and epigraphy of their seals.

Historians are remarkably fortunate that substantial numbers of thirteenth-century seal impressions survive from London. In this period, people appended seals to many different types of records. Due to the survival of large numbers of medieval documents, seal impressions are common in repositories. Paul Harvey has estimated that the National Archives hold 50,000 examples and that in the nation there could be several hundreds of thousands.¹¹ From thirteenth-century London alone a few thousand surviving records of property conveyance provide an important source of seal impressions.¹² At the National Archives, the E40 series is an exceptionally rich

⁷ For the governance of the city in this period see: D. Keene, 'London from the post-Roman period to 1300', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, i: 600–1540, ed. D.M. Palliser (Cambridge, 2000), 203–11; G.A. Williams, *Medieval London: From Commune to Capital* (1963). For maps of London, see *Historic Town Atlas: The City of London from Prehistoric Times to c.1520*, ed. M.D. Lobel (Oxford, 1989).

⁸ For a full list of the seals, see Table 1.

⁹ Scholars have used the term 'seal' to refer to both the matrix (or die) and the impressions of it: Jenkinson, *Guide to Seals in the Public Record Office*, 3; R.H. Bautier, *Vocabulaire international de la sigillographie* (Rome, 1990), 44; Harvey and McGuinness, *Guide to British Medieval Seals*, 1; E.A. New, *Seals and Sealing Practices* (2010), 7. However, the term 'seal' can also refer to the graphic elements manifested in the impression: *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn, s.v. 'seal'. To avoid confusion, these three distinct senses of the term will be distinguished in this paper. The term 'seal' will be reserved for the graphic elements, including all epigraphy and iconography displayed by the seal, and the terms 'seal matrix' and 'seal impression' for these respective objects. See also: B.M. Bedos-Rezak, 'In search of a semiotic paradigm: the matter of sealing in medieval thought and praxis (1050–1400)', in *Good Impressions: Image and Authority in Medieval Seals*, ed. N. Adams, J. Cherry and J. Robinson (2008), 3–4.

¹⁰ For some observations on seal usage by the city's mercantile elite in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see: S. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London: 1300–1500* (Michigan, 1948), 249–56. See also: E. New, 'Representation and identity in medieval London: the evidence of seals', in *London and the Kingdom: Essays in Honour of Caroline M. Barron*, ed. M. Davies and A. Prescott (Donington, 2008), 246–58.

¹¹ P.D.A. Harvey, 'Computer catalogue of seals in the Public Record Office, London', *Janus* (1996), part 2, 29; P.D.A. Harvey, 'Seals and the dating of documents', in *Dating Undated Medieval Charters*, ed. M. Gervers (Woodbridge, 2000), 207.

¹² The precise number is unknown because they have never been systematically counted. At the time of writing, the dataset from which the evidence for this paper is drawn contained information regarding more than 4,000 documents, including both originals and copies. For a detailed guide to the sources

source of material from London.¹³ The next most important collection is that of St Paul's Cathedral, which is currently held by the Guildhall Library.¹⁴ The deeds of St Bartholomew's Hospital, which are in the hospital's archive, are another valuable resource.¹⁵ Significant numbers also survive in a number of other repositories, including the British Library, the London Metropolitan Archive and the archives of Westminster Abbey and Canterbury Cathedral. Seal impressions are fragile, and many of these documents have lost their original impressions. Nonetheless a significant proportion of the documents retain one or more seal impressions. In the course of surveying the deeds for this paper, the author noted more than 1,500 seal impressions appended to records dated prior to 1300.¹⁶

Although this is a significant number of seal impressions, thirteenth-century London was a substantial city and the surviving seal impressions certainly represent the seals of only a fraction of the population.¹⁷ However, members of all social groups in London who had land or property to convey or business to be agreed in writing were using seals by c. 1200.¹⁸ For example, a fragment of the seal of Gilbert 'Tannator' son of Tokus 'Tannator' survives from c. 1185.¹⁹ A seal of Jordan 'Draperus' survives from c. 1200.²⁰ An impression of the seal of Mark 'Carpentarius' dates from 1199–1217.²¹ These examples demonstrate that a wide range of Londoners were validating documents with seals by the turn of the century. Thus the sigillographic record is a rich seam of historical evidence, within which one can focus on the seals of a particular group, such as the men holding positions of leadership in the civic government.

Most of London's inhabitants occupied a middle ground in English society, between the extremes of wealth and poverty. However, the most prominent

relating to landholding in London, see D. Keene and V. Harding, *A Survey of Documentary Sources for Property Holding in London before the Great Fire* (Record Society, 1985).

¹³ A convenient point of entry into the series is provided by a printed calendar: *Descriptive Calendar of Ancient Deeds in the Public Record Office*, 6 vols (1890–1915).

¹⁴ *Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts: Ninth Report*, 2 parts (1883–84), i, 1–59.

¹⁵ Most of the surviving original deeds were copied into the hospital's cartulary: *Cartulary of St Bartholomew's Hospital*, ed. N.J.M. Kerling (1973). The remainder are accessible through a card index in the search room. When deeds from this repository are cited, the number from Kerling's calendar of the cartulary will be listed in brackets after the deed number, e.g. SBH deed 1(25).

¹⁶ This figure includes seals from the twelfth century. They are difficult to distinguish from the thirteenth-century materials because many of the documents from prior to c. 1215 are hard to date with precision. Perhaps 7 per cent of the sample is twelfth century. Most of the surviving twelfth-century seal impressions are from the last quarter of the century and only a handful are prior to c. 1175, see: J. McEwan, 'Formation of a sealing society: London, c. 1100–1220', in *Coins, Seals, Identity and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. S. Solway (forthcoming: Turnhout).

¹⁷ Estimates for the size of London's population c. 1300 range from 60,000 to 100,000: P. Nightingale, 'The growth of London in the medieval English economy', in *Progress and Problems in Medieval England: Essays in Honour of Edward Miller*, ed. R. Britnell and J. Hatcher (Cambridge, 1996), 96; D. Keene, 'A new study of London before the Great Fire', *Urban History Yearbook* (1984), 20; D. Keene, 'Medieval London and its region', *London Journal* 14 (1989), 101.

¹⁸ For English seals in the twelfth century, see: T.A.H. Heslop, 'English seals from the mid-ninth century to 1100', *J. of the British Archaeological Association* 133 (1980), 14–16; T.A.H. Heslop, 'Seals', *English Romanesque Art: 1066–1200*, ed. G. Zarnecki, J. Holt and T. Holland (1984), 298–319; T.A.H. Heslop, 'Seals as evidence of metalworking in England in the later twelfth century', in *Art and Patronage in the English Romanesque*, ed. S. Macready and F.H. Thompson (1986), 50–60; McEwan, 'Formation of a sealing society'.

¹⁹ SBH, deed 823 (507).

²⁰ SBH, deed 1270 (672).

²¹ GL MS 25121/1355; *Early Charters of the Cathedral Church of St Paul, London*, ed. M. Gibbs (London: CS, 1939), no. 209.

Londoners maintained a distinguished lifestyle. William FitzStephen, writing in the 1170s, states that 'the citizens of London are regarded as conspicuous above all others for their polished manners, for their dress and for the good tables which they keep'.²² Chroniclers in the thirteenth century mention Londoners wearing conspicuously costly clothes on important ceremonial occasions.²³ In other words, the most prominent men of London had the capacity and desire to display the material attributes of high social standing. From this group were chosen the men who held the offices of mayor, sheriff, and alderman in the civic government. At the top of the political hierarchy was the mayor, who was elected annually but often served several successive terms.²⁴ He was at once a personification of the political community and an authority figure who presided over his fellow citizens. He acted in concert with the two sheriffs of London, who had financial, administrative and judicial duties. From 1230 they served for one year, although they were permitted multiple terms provided the terms were not consecutive.²⁵ The mayor and sheriffs were supported by the aldermen who each took responsibility for one of the city's wards, and normally held office indefinitely. Given their power, wealth and social aspirations, it could be argued that they are best regarded as part of the kingdom's ruling elite.

However, in the thirteenth century, social standing was not simply a measure of wealth and power; it was also a matter of ideology. The concept of nobility, as it developed in this period, was closely identified with knighthood, and men who had similar or even superior economic power to knights, yet who did not assume knightly status, 'had to accept a non-noble and inferior standing'.²⁶ At the same time, London's leading men were also coming to identify themselves more closely with their role as merchants and artisans through their increasing involvement in trade, which further served to divide them from the nobility.²⁷ The development of the language that the Crown used to address the politically significant segment of London reveals the separation of the Londoners and the nobility. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, they were called 'the barons of London'.²⁸ As David Crouch has shown, in this period the term 'barons' could mean 'leading men' and was applied to townsmen, including the Londoners.²⁹ Nevertheless, the sense of the word gradually narrowed to refer only to the king's leading men, before coming to designate men who occupied a social level between earls and knights.³⁰ London's

²² 'William fitz Stephen: description of the city of London (1170–1183)', transl. D.C. Douglas and G.W. Greenaway, *English Historical Documents: 1042–1189* (1953), 957; A.J. Duggan, 'William fitz Stephen (fl. 1162–1174)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

²³ F. Lachaud, 'Dress and social status in England before the sumptuary laws', in *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display in Medieval England*, ed. P. Coss and M. Keen (Woodbridge, 2002), 118–19.

²⁴ Precisely when the office of mayor of London was created is uncertain. London's first mayor, Henry son of Ailwin, is first recorded in the office in the early 1190s: C.N.L. Brooke, *London 800–1216, the Shaping of a City* (1975), 245–6.

²⁵ From 1191 sheriffs served for a year, but from 1218 two years became customary. In 1230 the term was again restricted to a year and this proved to be an enduring arrangement: *Chronicles of the Mayors and Sheriffs of London*, ed. and tr. H.T. Riley (1863), 6; C. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People 1200–1500* (Oxford, 2004), 311–14.

²⁶ D. Crouch, *The English Aristocracy, 1072–1272* (New Haven, 2011), 37.

²⁷ Reynolds, 'The Rulers of London', 352. See also D. Crouch, *The Image of Aristocracy in Britain, 1000–1300* (1992), 25.

²⁸ E. Mason, *Westminster Abbey Charters, 1066–c.1214* (London Record Society, 1988), nos. 49, 77, 90, 97, 109.

²⁹ Crouch, *English Aristocracy*, 48–9.

³⁰ Crouch, *English Aristocracy*, 49.

rulers continued to use the title well into the reign of Henry III.³¹ Indeed the city's common seal, which is first mentioned in the early thirteenth century, was engraved on the obverse: *SIGILLUM BARONVM LONDONIARVM*.³² Crouch suggests that the title 'baron' was used in cities and towns from the later twelfth century in the sense of 'leading men', but it is clear that some contemporaries regarded it as a gesture of social pretension: in 1248, Matthew Paris reports that Henry III mocked Londoners' use of the title, exclaiming: 'those peasant Londoners, who call themselves barons' (*illi rustici Londonienses, que se barones appellant*).³³ By the fourteenth century, the social divide between the Londoners and the aristocracy was deeply entrenched such that when events such as tournaments were held in the city, as Sheila Lindenbaum has argued, the Londoners became 'spectators watching the world of chivalry pass through their city and superimpose a foreign identity on the landscape'.³⁴ To what extent the most prominent men of London were content to be excluded from the aristocracy is an important question that historians have yet to resolve conclusively.³⁵ Nonetheless, what is certain is that the city's ruling men had exceptional wealth and occupied a position at the apex of civic society, but they were not accepted by the aristocracy as members of their social category.

Surviving administrative and judicial materials enable historians to consider the economic interests, social networks, and family connections of the men involved in civic government. Their seals, however, are marks of identity that offer further evidence of their roles in society. Fortunately, the seals of men involved in civic government survive in sufficient numbers to enable a productive analysis; indeed they are remarkably well-represented among the surviving examples.³⁶ Approximately 280 men are recorded acting as mayor, sheriff or alderman in the period c. 1190–1300.³⁷ To date the author has identified seals used by 57 men who held a civic

³¹ James Tait has noted that 'much uncertainty has prevailed about the application of the term in London': *The Medieval English Borough: Studies on its Origin and Constitutional History* (Manchester, 1936), 256. Precisely which men could claim to be 'barons of London' is problematic. One possibility is that it was synonymous with 'citizen' and thus covered a sizable portion of the adult male population, or it may have indicated a more select group. Moreover, it is likely that the way it was used changed over time. Investigating the meaning of the term is difficult because the sources rarely indicate specifically which men were referred to as 'barons of London'. Two mid thirteenth-century records suggest that by this date it was men who held the high civic offices. Reginald Bungay, Simon son of Mary, and Joyce son of Peter are described as 'barons of London' in a witness list of 1239: GL MS 25122/607; Gibbs, *Early Charters of St Paul's Cathedral*, no. 333. Nicholas Bat, Robert de Cornhill, Geoffrey de Winchester, and Robert Hardel are described in the same way in another witness list of 1250: LMA CLA/007/EM/02/C/19. All these men served as aldermen in the mid thirteenth century: J. McEwan, 'The aldermen of London, c. 1200–80: Alfred Beaven revisited' (forthcoming: *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Soc.*, 2012), table 1.

³² T.A. Heslop, 'Seal of the barons of London', in *The Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200–1400*, ed. J. Alexander and P. Binski (1987), 273.

³³ Crouch, *English Aristocracy*, 49; CM, v. 22.

³⁴ S. Lindenbaum, 'The Smithfield tournament of 1390', *J. of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 20 (1990), 11.

³⁵ For an important contribution to this debate, see: C. Barron, 'Chivalry, pageantry and merchant culture', in *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display in Medieval England*, eds. P. Coss and M. Keen (Woodbridge, 2002), 219–41, esp. 222.

³⁶ Although this paper is entirely concerned with evidence from London, seals of men who served in civic offices in other towns also survive. For some late twelfth-century examples from Oxford, see: *Facsimile of Early Charters in Oxford Muniment Rooms*, ed. H.E. Salter (Oxford, 1929), no. 89.

³⁷ Reynolds, 'Rulers of London', 345 and tables 1 and 2; Brooke, *London 800–1216*, appendix B; Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, appendix A; A.B. Beaven, *The Aldermen of the City of London*, 2 vols. (1908–13), i, 362–5; McEwan, 'The aldermen of London', table 1.

office in the twelfth or thirteenth century, and undoubtedly more can be found.³⁸ Men could use several different seal matrices over the course of their lives and thus some are represented by several seals, giving a total sample of 71 seals. Moreover, multiple impressions of some seal matrices survive, so that total number of seal impressions is 117. These are significant numbers both in terms of the proportion of the men involved in government and in the total number of surviving seal impressions. The men who used these seals were all socially, economically and politically distinguished, but they used seals with differing features. To explain their diversity, historians need to set these seals in a broader sigillographic context, and examine the relationship between the iconography and epigraphy of the seals and the biographies of their owners.

A brief study of one such owner demonstrates that sigillographic evidence can make an important contribution to our understanding of a particular individual. Simon son of Mary is perhaps best remembered as the founder, in October 1247, of the religious house dedicated to St Mary of Bethlehem that developed into the notorious Bedlam Hospital.³⁹ To his contemporaries, however, Simon was a notable and controversial civic politician.⁴⁰ Compared with many of his colleagues in the civic government, Simon's life is exceptionally well documented, and he has featured prominently in recent studies.⁴¹ Simon was probably born between 1200 and 1210 and his father was known in London as Walter of Fulham.⁴² Simon emerges in the mid 1230s as a prominent civic leader.⁴³ In October 1247, Simon gave property on the outskirts of London to the order of St Mary of Bethlehem for the purpose of establishing a new priory.⁴⁴ Simon's desire to found a new institution, rather than to support an existing one, was an exceptional but not unprecedented gesture. Throughout the thirteenth century, the elite of London proved to be generous supporters of religious and charitable organizations.⁴⁵ However, Nicholas Vincent notes that there is no evidence that the order of Bethlehem held any property in England prior to 1245; Simon may have been the first man to give them land.⁴⁶ Simon's decision to favour the order of St Mary of Bethlehem requires explanation. Certainly the appearance of the bishop of Bethlehem, Goffredo de Prefetti, in England in 1246–7, and his favourable reception by Henry III, must have contributed to Simon's decision to favour his religious order. Indeed, Simon might well have learned of the order from Goffredo, and Henry III may have asked Simon to give his support. Political considerations were important to Simon, but he also had

³⁸ See Table 1.

³⁹ M. Reddan, 'St. Mary of Bethlehem' in W. Page, *VCH London* (1909), 495–8 reprinted in *The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex*, eds. C.M. Barron and M. Davies (2007), 113–15.

⁴⁰ The events of Simon's political career are described in a contemporary chronicle attributed to the alderman Arnold son of Thedmar: Riley, *Chronicles of the Mayors and Sheriffs of London*.

⁴¹ J. Andrews et al., *The History of Bethlehem*, 21–35; N. Vincent, 'Goffredo de Prefetti and the Church of Bethlehem in England', *J. of Ecclesiastical History* 49 (1998), 213–35; J. McEwan, 'The development of an identity in thirteenth-century London: the personal seals of Simon FitzMary', in *Pourquoi les sceaux? La sigillographie, nouvel enjeu de l'histoire de l'art*, ed. Marc Gil and Jean-Luc Chassel (Lille, 2011), 255–74.

⁴² The date c. 1200 is suggested in Andrews, *History of Bethlehem*, 27.

⁴³ Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, 314.

⁴⁴ For the site of the religious house, see Lobel, *Historic Town Atlas*, 89 and map 3.

⁴⁵ C.M. Barron, 'Introduction' in *The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex*, 7; J. Röhrkasten, 'Mendicants in the metropolis: the Londoners and the development of the London friaries', *TCE* 6, 65–75.

⁴⁶ Vincent, 'Goffredo de Prefetti', 219.



Fig. 1. Seal of Simon son of Mary:
34 x 24mm
GL Ms 25121/214
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of St Paul's Cathedral (London Metropolitan
Archives)

pious motives.⁴⁷ In the foundation charter Simon emphasizes his belief in the crucial role of the virgin birth in the salvation of humankind.⁴⁸ The declaration suggests that he subscribed to the order's Marian focus and wanted to be identified by his devotion to the Virgin Mary.⁴⁹ Further evidence that Simon made Marian devotion part of his identity can be found in his seals. Simon had at least three seals and one of them, which dates to no later than 1243–4, displays an image of the Virgin Mary (Fig. 1).⁵⁰ The design could be explained as a play on Simon's matronymic surname. The legend on the seal, however, suggests that Simon intended the seal to reflect his self-perception as a man devoted to the Virgin. The legend reads: *DO PROLI PROPRIE: TE SIMON NATE MARIE*.⁵¹ Through this choice of language, Simon was signalling that he was a spiritual child of the Virgin Mary, rather than (or in addition to) the biological son of a woman named Mary. The case of Simon son of Mary demonstrates that in the mid thirteenth century London's high civic officers were expressing their identities through their seals. The fortunate survival of a chronicle account and records associated with his charitable activities enables historians to situate Simon's seals in a broader context and thus apply their evidence towards elucidating his identity. For many of his colleagues, those resources are not available. Nonetheless, historians must be alive to the possibility that his colleagues' selections of epigraphy and iconography for their seals were equally deliberate and demonstrative. However, it is also important to recognize that none of the motifs

⁴⁷ Andrews, *The History of Bethlem*, 33.

⁴⁸ W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, 6 vols (1817–30), vol. 6, pt. II, 622–3.

⁴⁹ For Marian devotion, see: R. Fulton, 'Mary', in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 4: *Christianity in Western Europe c.1100–c.1500*, eds. Miri Rubin and Walter Simons (Cambridge, 2009), 283–96; N. Morgan, 'Texts and images of Marian devotion in thirteenth-century England', in *England in the Thirteenth Century: Proc. of the 1989 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. W.M. Ormrod (Stamford, 1991), 69–103.

⁵⁰ Andrews, *The History of Bethlem*, 22; J. McEwan, 'The development of an identity in thirteenth-century London', 262–3. See also, below: Table 1.

⁵¹ 'I give to my own offspring, O Simon son of Mary'. I wish to thank Robert Ireland for discussing the seal with me.



Fig. 2. Seal of Ralph Steperanc:
45mm
SBH deed 1104
Courtesy of St Bartholomew's
Hospital Archives

that Simon used on his seals were unusual in London.⁵² While he had personal reasons for his choices, he selected motifs from a common cultural storehouse that he shared with the other people of London.

The seals of Simon's colleagues in the civic government are diverse, but many share common features. Significant numbers of men involved in the city government had seals with an equestrian image, shields of arms or incorporating engraved gems, which are all types of seals that historians have identified with the aristocracy.⁵³ The city's first mayor, Henry son of Ailwin, used an equestrian seal featuring a man hawking.⁵⁴ Another of his contemporaries, William Buccointe son of Sabeline, employed a similar image.⁵⁵ However, other civic leaders in this period had seals with the more conventional representation of an armoured man on horseback. The earliest known example is the seal of Rayner son of Berenger.⁵⁶ The last known example is provided by the seal of Ralph Steperanc, who is recorded acting as alderman in the period c. 1220–28 (Fig. 2).⁵⁷ A number of scholars have argued that at the beginning of the thirteenth century the highest nobility in England continued to use equestrian seals, but men of lesser – though still distinguished – social

⁵² See below, note 61, 73.

⁵³ Crouch, *Image of Aristocracy*, 242–5.

⁵⁴ None of the four impressions of his seal are complete: LMA CLA/007/EM/02/B/94, B/095, F/035; TNA E42/79. For a provisional reconstruction of the design, see: J. McEwan, 'Horses, horsemen and hunting: leading Londoners and equestrian seals in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries', *Essays in Medieval Studies* 22 (2005), 79. Harvey and McGuinness have suggested that this design is rare in England, and that men of standing preferred an armoured man on horseback: *Guide to British Medieval Seals*, 46.

⁵⁵ SBH 1230/10; TNA E40/1474, 1788; TNA E42/54. William served as sheriff in 1183–84: Mason, *Westminster Abbey Charters*, nos. 293, 361; Kerling, *Cartulary of St Bartholomew's Hospital*, no. 735.

⁵⁶ SBH deed 9. He acted as sheriff of London 1153–1163: Reynolds, 'Rulers of London,' table 2.

⁵⁷ SBH deeds 1104(93); 1108(122); 1080(121); 1115(120).



Fig. 3. Seal of Gervase le Cordwainer: 29 x 23mm
TNA E40/11861

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status began to favour shields of arms instead.⁵⁸ At the beginning of the thirteenth century Londoners participated in this change and started to use shields of arms on their seals.⁵⁹ The seal of Alan son of Peter, who is recorded acting as alderman in the period 1212–14, provides an early example.⁶⁰ One of Simon son of Mary's three known seals presents a shield of arms.⁶¹ Nicholas Bat, who served as mayor, sheriff and alderman in the mid thirteenth century, also had one.⁶² Several of the late thirteenth-century aldermen used shields of arms, including Stephen Ashwy, Henry le Waleys, Jordan Godchep, Joyce le Achatur, Stephen de Cornhill, Gregory de Rokesle, Walter de Rokesle and Richer de Refham.⁶³ A further set of seals of a type that scholars have associated with the aristocracy incorporate engraved gems.⁶⁴ These precious or semi-precious stones, some of which may have been genuine survivals from the classical period whereas others were medieval creations, were set into a matrix and then used as a seal.⁶⁵ Richard Renger, mayor, sheriff and alderman in the mid thirteenth century, had a seal featuring a man facing left holding a spear.⁶⁶ Gervase le Cordwainer was an alderman in the same period; he used a standing man with a raised right arm (Fig. 3).⁶⁷ Robert Blund, alderman in the early thirteenth

⁵⁸ A. Ailes, 'The knight's alter ego: from equestrian to armorial seal', in *Good Impressions*, ed. Adams et al., 10; C. Hunter Blair, 'Armorial on English seals from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries', *Archaeologia* 89 (1943), 1; Harvey and McGuinness, *Guide to British Medieval Seals*, 50. For France, see B. Bedos-Rezak, 'Social implications', 159–60.

⁵⁹ J.A. Goodall, 'The use of armorial bearings by London aldermen in the Middle Ages', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Soc.* 20 (1961), 17–18.

⁶⁰ TNA E40/6884; SBH Deed 1229 (615).

⁶¹ GL MS 25121/1070; McEwan, 'The development of an identity in thirteenth-century London', 263.

⁶² LMA CLA/007/EM/02/A/4.

⁶³ CCA-DC-ChAnt/S/40; GL MS 25121/23, 1231; TNA DL25/112, 113, 121; TNA E40/1994, 6903, 10217, 10373; TNA E42/48; TNA E326/2040; TNA LR 14/605; R. Ellis, *Catalogue of Seals in the Public Record Office: Personal Seals*, vol. 1 (1978), 56, no. P679; WAM Deed 28862.

⁶⁴ Harvey and McGuinness, *Guide to British Medieval Seals*, 13–14; M. Henig, 'The re-use and copying of ancient intaglios set in medieval personal seals, mainly found in England: An aspect of the renaissance of the 12th century', in *Good Impressions*, ed. Adams et al., 25–34.

⁶⁵ For a medieval seal matrix incorporating a Roman coin, see R. Lindenthal, 'Ordinary lives: medieval personal seal matrices', in *Recording Medieval Lives: Proc. of the 2005 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. J. Boffey and V. Davis (Donington, 2009), 228–9.

⁶⁶ TNA DL25/132; TNA E40/11002.

⁶⁷ TNA E40/11861.



Fig. 4. Seal of John Norman: 28 x 22mm
TNA E40/2430

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century, had a seal which displayed three people: one is seated at the centre and the others are flanking him on either side.⁶⁸ Additional examples are the seals of Alan son of Peter, Arnold son of Alulf, Nicholas son of Joce, Ralph Ashwy, William Hardel, Thomas son of Thomas, and William de Haverhill.⁶⁹ That men involved in civic government made considerable use of seals featuring an equestrian image or shields of arms, or incorporating engraved gems, does call into question the status of these seals as indicators of specifically aristocratic standing. Whether they appropriated these seals to demonstrate affiliation with the nobility or selected them because the seals had been popularized over time is a complex issue that deserves further investigation. What is certain is that London's leading men used these types of seals to declare their distinguished social standing.

Not all the men who held civic offices used seals which parallel those of the aristocracy. Some of the leading London men had seals that communicated distinguished social standing, but without using motifs typically favoured by the aristocracy. John Norman, mayor, sheriff and alderman in the mid-thirteenth century, had a seal that depicts a crenellated tower, with a deeply inset gate at its base, flanked on either side by walls (Fig. 4).⁷⁰ Bartholomew de Castello, who acted as a sheriff and aldermen in the third quarter of the thirteenth century, also had a fortified building on his seal.⁷¹ In his case this motif had the additional benefit of serving as a play on his name. Nonetheless, in both these cases, the fortified building evokes power and privilege. Another example of a seal which departs from the pattern favoured by the aristocracy, but still suggests its owner's distinction, is that of the late thirteenth-century alderman, sheriff, and fishmonger, Richard de Chigwell. He owned 'ships, quays, mills', operated a 'large staff of agents', handled 'Hanseatic timber, cloth, wool, wine and massive quantities of grain', and had a seal which displays a full-length stag in profile, facing left, with an arrow or spear.⁷² Richard's use of this motif is intriguing because it suggests an association with hunting, an important leisure activity of the aristocracy. These men adopted relatively unusual motifs that nevertheless clearly identified them as men of standing. These men used seals as

⁶⁸ SBH Deed 881 (882).

⁶⁹ CCA-DC-ChAnt/S/301, ChAnt/S/305; GL MS 25121/714; TNA TNA DL25/135, E40/6884, 1914, 2507; SBH Deeds 861(151), 945 (772), 978 (713), 1227 (603), 1229 (615).

⁷⁰ TNA E40/2430.

⁷¹ TNA E326/ 11896, 12648.

⁷² GL MS 25121/624; TNA E326/10005; Williams, *Medieval London*, 166.



Fig. 5. Seal of William de Faringdon: 24mm

GL Ms 25121/205

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signs of status, but they were not bound to use the particular types of seals favoured by the aristocracy.

Other men had seals which drew attention to their piety or their craft. Simon son of Mary, whose seals have already been discussed, used a seal displaying the image of the Virgin and Child, but so did his contemporary, Roger Duke, who served as mayor, sheriff and alderman in the early thirteenth century, while Adam de Bentley, sheriff in 1246, had a seal with a Lamb of God.⁷³ An excellent example of a man using a seal with a motif related to his craft is offered by Adam Blund of Fulham, who was alderman and sheriff in the last decade of the thirteenth century. He used two almost identical seals that present crossed hands with a fish, above, and an eel, below.⁷⁴ He was a fishmonger, like Richard de Chigwell, and the fish and eel evoked his trade. So too did the motif on the seal of the goldsmith William de Faringdon (Fig. 5).⁷⁵ The three surviving impressions of his seal feature a representation of an ornate standing covered cup with ring brooches on either side. That this was a trade identifier is suggested by its appearance in the arms of the Goldsmiths' Company, which are recorded in the fifteenth century.⁷⁶ The men using religious imagery were claiming a place in the broader Christian community, whereas the men with motifs relating to their professions were associating themselves with particular groups of artisans and merchants. These seals remind historians that these men's identities were not necessarily defined by their roles in civic government alone.

Some of the men involved in civic government used seals incorporating engraved gems, displaying shields of arms or an equestrian image, and a few men, such as Simon son of Mary, used several seals with contrasting features. It could be argued that because the men had a similar position in civic society and yet their seals have

⁷³ SBH deed 755(604); SBH deed 1178(727).

⁷⁴ Seal 1: TNA E326/2064; TNA E326/2038; TNA E326/2020; LMA CLA/007/EM/02/F/33; Seal 2: TNA E326/2041. The seals can be distinguished because on the second matrix the legend begins at a different point in relation to the motif.

⁷⁵ For his identification as a goldsmith, see: GL Ms 25121/1561. For impressions of his seal, see: GL MS 25121/140, 205, 404.

⁷⁶ T.F. Reddaway and L.E.M. Walker, *The Early History of the Goldsmiths' Company* (1975), 161–2, n. 125 and pl. 1; T.A. Heslop, 'Seals of merchants, citizens and freemen', in *The Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200–1400*, ed. J. Alexander and P. Binski (1987), 275–6. For an example, dated 1325, of a goldsmith using the ring-brooch on his seal, see New, 'Representation and identity in medieval London', 257.

varying features, the seals do not indicate social standing. Some of the differences in the seals can be attributed to members of the group changing over time from favouring one style to another, such as their shift from the equestrian image to shields of arms. However, there are also differences in what the men announce with their seals, for they selected iconography and epigraphy to variously proclaim their affiliation with a profession, their piety, or their distinguished social status. These were three aspects of the identity of the city's leading men, and each individual could choose which one to emphasize. Consequently the seals used by these men do not have a single common feature, but they are nonetheless appropriate to their position in society. This observation has implications for historians investigating the seals of other groups of people outside the aristocracy. Scholars may not, as yet, have found in seals features that indicate that the sigillant was a member of a relatively humble social category, such as peasant, artisan, trader or cleric, but those features may exist.⁷⁷ Perhaps historians have hitherto missed the key features that would indicate those affiliations: only a fraction of the surviving seals have been catalogued, so we are far from having exhausted the evidence. Another possibility is that there was not a single key feature, as in the case of the seals of the men involved in London's civic government. Just as the aristocracy could use a number of different types of seals to announce their standing, so too could people of lesser standing.⁷⁸ Therefore, to understand the seals of people outside the aristocracy, researchers need to proceed in an empirical fashion and set each seal in a social context by contextualizing it with evidence about its owner. When historians can compare large numbers of seals accompanied with information about their owners, then the seals will yield important insights into medieval society.

Table 1. Handlist of seal impressions

Every effort has been made to ensure that the seal impressions listed below were used by the men in question. However, as the prosopography of thirteenth-century London is an area of ongoing research, all identifications are provisional. For the dates when these men served in office, please refer to the standard guides (Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*; Beaven, *The Aldermen of the City of London*; Brooke, *London 800–1216*; McEwan 'The aldermen of London, c. 1200–80'; Reynolds 'The Rulers of London'). When a man used two seal matrices they are distinguished by a number in brackets. As an aid to identification, a key motif on each seal matrix is listed. The date associated with each impression is the date of the document to which the seal is appended.

List of Abbreviations:

- BL (British Library)
- CCA (Canterbury Cathedral Archive)
- GL (Guildhall Library)
- LMA (London Metropolitan Archives)
- SBH (St Bartholomew's Hospital Archive)
- TNA (The National Archives)
- WAM (Westminster Abbey Muniment Room)

⁷⁷ Harvey and McGuinness, *Guide to British Medieval Seals*, 78.

⁷⁸ Crouch, *Image of Aristocracy*, 244–5.

Name	Mayor	Sheriff	Alderman	Seal Matrix	Seal Impression Reference	Document Date
Adam de Bentley		•		Lamb of God	SBH Deed 755 (604)	1252-53
Adam Blund de Fulham		•	•	(1) Crossed Hands	TNA E326/2064	1281-82
"				"	TNA E326/2038	1287-88
"				"	LMA CLA/007/EM/02/F/33	1301-2
"				"	TNA E326/2020	1303-4
"				(2) Crossed Hands	TNA E326/2041	1306-7
Alan son of Peter			•	(1) Shield	TNA E40/6884	1213-14
"				"	SBH Deed 1229 (615)	1215
"				(2) Figures	TNA E40/6884	1213-14
"				"	SBH Deed 1229 (615)	1215
Arnold son of Alulf		•		Bust	GL MS 25121/714	c. 1200-32
"				"	SBH Deed 1227 (603)	1215
"				"	CCA-DC-ChAnt/S/301	1222-26
"				"	CCA-DC-ChAnt/S/305	1222-26
Bartholomew de Castello			•	Crenellated Building	TNA E326/12648	1241-42
"				"	TNA E326/11896	1249-50
Constantine son of Alulf		•	•	Undetermined	SBH Deed 469 (897)	1215
Ellis Russell	•	•	•	Beast	TNA E213/320	1296-97
Gervase le Cordwainer		•	•	Human Figure	TNA E40/11861	1253-54
Gervase de Cornhill		•		Lion	CCA-DC-ChAnt/C/859	1177-79
Gregory de Rokesle	•	•	•	Shield	TNA E40/6903	c. 1263-91
"				"	TNA E42/48	c. 1263-91
Henry de Walemunt		•		Lion	TNA LR14/549	1269-70
Henry le Waleys	•	•	•	(1) Shield	CCA-DC-ChAnt/S/40	1293
"				"	TNA E40/1994	1298
"				(2) Shield	GL MS 25121/23	1298-99
				"	TNA DL25/1300	1299-1300
Henry son of Ailwin	•		•	Equestrian	LMA CLA/007/EM/02/B/94	1176-1212
"				"	LMA CLA/007/EM/02/F/35	1190-1212

Name	Mayor	Sheriff	Alderman	Seal Matrix	Seal Impression Reference	Document Date
"				"	LMA CLA/007/EM/02/B/95	1200-12
"				"	TNA E42/79	1160-1212
Henry son of Rayner son of Berenger			•	Bird	TNA E40/1803	1200
"				"	SBH Deed 1095 (548)	1200
"				"	SBH Deed 1282 (684)	1190-1212
James Blund			•	Beast	SBH Deed 1306 (1039)	1225
John Buccointe		•		Equestrian	SBH Deed 1230 (10)	1180
"				"	GL MS 25121/543	1185
John Norman	•	•	•	Crenellated Building	TNA E40/ 2430	1249-50
Jordan Godchep		•		(1) Leg	GL MS 25121/1229	1283-84
"				(2) Shield	GL MS 25121/1231	1286-87
Jordan son of Jordan son of Sperling			•	Standing Figure	SBH Deed 7 (1024)	1195
Joyce le Achatur			•	(1) Bird	TNA E40/2009	1277-78
"				"	TNA E326/2040	1281-82
"				(2) Shield	TNA E329/41	1286-87
Michael de Valencines		•		Standing Figure	SBH Deed 400(68)	1200
"				"	SBH Deed 1207 (352)	1200-1212
Nicholas Bat	•	•	•	Shield	LMA CLA/007/EM/02/A/4	1240-56
Nicholas son of Joce		•	•	Seated Figure	SBH Deed 861 (151)	1259
"				Horseman	SBH Deed 861 (151)	1259
Ralph de Alegate Clerk			•	Lion	TNA E40/4016	1275-76
"				Lion	TNA E40/1764	c. 1260-1301
"				Lion	GL MS 25121/1500	1277-78
Ralph Ashwy	•	•	•	Bust	TNA DL25/135	1239-41
Ralph Steperanc			•	Equestrian	SBH Deed 1104 (93)	1200

"			"	SBH Deed 1108 (122)	1210
"			"	SBH Deed 1080 (121)	1210
"			"	SBH Deed 1115 (120)	1200
Rayner son of Berenger	•		Equestrian	SBH Deed 9	1170
Reginald Viel	•		Horsemen	SBH Deed 1290 (990)	1190
Richard Ashwy Draper		•	Lion and Bird	GL MS 25121/246	1298
"			"	LMA CLA/007/ EM/02/B/51	1277-78
"			"	GL MS 25121/1664	1288-89
Richard de Chigwell	•	•	Stag	GL MS 25121/624	1297-98
			"	TNA E326/10005	1305-06
Richard son of Rayner	•		Lion	SBH Deed 1267 (841)	1185
Richard son of Renger	•	•	(1) Standing Man	TNA E40/11002	c. 1220-40
"			(2) Standing Man	TNA DL25 /132	1235
"			"	TNA E40/ 11002	c. 1220-40
Richard son of Walter	•	•	(?Hand)	GL MS 25121/238	1256-57
Richer de Refham	•	•	Shield	TNA LR14/605	1318
Robert Blund	•	•	(1) Bird	SBH Deed 881 (882)	1210
"			"	SBH Deed 452 (893)	1210
"			(2) Figures	SBH Deed 881 (882)	1210
Robert Solio		•	Beast	SBH Deed 1235 (1009)	1225
Roger Duke	•	•	Virgin&Child	SBH Deed 1178 (727)	1231-32
Roger son of Alan	•	•	Lion	BL Harley Charter 50 A 3	1190-1212
Simon son of Mary	•	•	(1) Shield	GL MS 25121/1070	1220-41
"			(2) Boar Head	GL MS 25121/214	1243-44
"			(3) Virgin&Child	GL MS 25121/214	1243-44
"			"	SBH Deed 1211(744)	1245
"			"	TNA E210/3160	1226-47

Name	Mayor	Sheriff	Alderman	Seal Matrix	Seal Impression Reference	Document Date
Solomon de Basing	•	•		Lily	SBH Deed 35 (13)	1222-23
Stephen Ashwy			•	Shield	TNA DL25/121	1275-76
Stephen de Cornhill		•		(1) Shield	TNA DL25/112	1281
"				"	TNA DL25/113	1281
"				"	TNA E40/10217	1285-86
"				"	TNA E40/10373	1285-86
"				(2) Cross	TNA DL25/111	1276
"				"	TNA DL25/112	1281
"				"	TNA DL25/113	1281
Thomas Romeyn	•	•	•	Undetermined	TNA E40/2295	1303
Thomas de Haverhill		•	•	Undetermined	TNA E40/2180	1204-05
Thomas son of Thomas son of Richard	•	•	•	Figures	TNA E40/1914	1240
Walter Rokesle			•	Shield	WAM Deed 28862	1290
William Chamberlain		•		Lion	TNA E40/1862	c. 1200-30
"				"	LMA CLA/007/ EM/02/B/47	c. 1200-30
"				"	TNA E40/1877	1214-26
William Hardel	•	•		Bust	SBH Deed 978 (713)	1220
William Joiner	•	•		(1) Device	GL MS 25121/108	1212-14
"				(2) Device	GL MS 25121/540	1244-45
"				"	GL MS 25121/542	1244-45
William Buccointe son of Sabeline		•		Equestrian	SBH Deed 1230(10)	1180
"				"	SBH Deed 1142(11)	c. 1200
"				"	TNA E40/1474	1190-1212
"				"	TNA E40/1788	1166-1232
"				"	TNA E42/54	c. 1202-06
William Senex		•	•	Bust	GL MS 25121/219	1246-47
William de Faringdon		•	•	Cup	GL MS 25121/140	1282
"				"	GL MS 25121/205	1286-87
"				"	GL MS 25121/404	1286-87

William de Hadstock	•		Bird	GL MS 25121/1436	1264–65
William de Haverhill	•	•	Figures	SBH Deed 945 (772)	1200
“			“	TNA E40/2507	1196
William son of Isabel	•		Bird	TNA C148/74	c. 1175– 1200
“			“	GL MS 25121/22	1133–1199
William son of Rayner		•	Buildings	TNA E42/312	1191–92
William son of Richard	•	•	Lily	GL MS 25121/1308	1220
